

SECRET**Strategic Warning Staff**

Washington, D.C. 20301

S-0007/SWS

6 February 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER FOR WARNING

SUBJECT : Review of the Role of the Strategic Warning Staff

Reference: NFAC Memo #353/81, Strategic Warning Staff, 29 Jan 81.

1. The following sets forth the view of the Strategic Warning Staff of the mission, composition, subordination, location, and publication policy of the Strategic Warning Staff, including improvements thereto, especially as related to the referenced study.
2. The mission of the Strategic Warning Staff, however its role is defined, is properly accomplished only if it ultimately improves the quality and timeliness of warning intelligence to consumers in the national security policy community. The strategic warning with which the Staff, and indeed the NIO/W, should be most concerned is that of events likely to have great significance to the security of the United States either because they involve vital national interests such as availability of Persian Gulf oil, or because they carry strong possibilities of bringing the forces of the United States into confrontation with the forces of the Soviet Union, North Korea, or China. There are indeed other changes in the world environment for which the policymakers would like warning but which are of less significance to United States security policy. The reporting and analysis of these changes seems more properly the domain of the large and well organized current intelligence establishments of the members of the intelligence community. Neither the Strategic Warning Staff nor any other part of the national intelligence warning system should become involved in the establishment of another current intelligence organization. There are clearly enough in the community.
3. As set forth in the DCID 1/5, the mission and role of the Strategic Warning Staff are tightly entwined with those of the NIO/W. The NIO/W's Letter of Instruction (LOI) for the Director, SWS of 2 October 1979, and subsequent advance work plans, reflect the close relationship of the Staff and the NIO/W's duties. The NIO/W outlined in the LOI the three main functions of the Staff as: serving as the conscience of the Intelligence Community with regard to strategic warning; providing synthesis of military, political, and economic intelligence related to strategic warning; and conducting research on strategic warning matters and promoting Community intelligence production in this field. The subsequent advance work plans broadened the specific areas of interest to include those that were, at the time, likely to involve significant

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security interests of the United States, such as Soviet penetration of specific nations along the sea lanes for shipment of oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe, especially where Soviet involvement might bring the US and USSR into confrontation. Based on the experience of the last year in a survey of some of the principal consumers of warning intelligence outside the intelligence community, the NIO/W directives as outlined above seem appropriate.

4. Consumers of intelligence and especially of warning intelligence have for some time--about ten years--pleaded for full expression of intelligence conclusions describing or predicting events, even including what has come to be known as alternative hypotheses. The Strategic Warning Staff was directed to provide "reasonable hypotheses not covered in other community publications, providing alternate explanations and short-term forecasts for situations of a threatening nature." According to some of the consumers of warning intelligence in security policy circles, the provision of alternative hypotheses has been invaluable. A complaint or lament often registered is that there have been too few instances over the years where such alternative hypotheses have been offered. Our experience on the Staff suggests that, although not impossible, it is extremely difficult for the main intelligence organizations to systematically provide such hypotheses. There is a certain normal inertia in bureaucracies that tends to slow a change in opinion about political or political-military events. It is clear, therefore, that some organization is needed to provide reasonable hypotheses not covered in other community publications to provide alternative explanations and short-term forecasts for situations of a threatening nature. Recent experience does, however, suggest that whatever organization is expected to provide such hypotheses should be autonomous from the main line intelligence production organizations, and preferably have direct access to the DCI. It should not be encumbered by an association with one or another production members of the intelligence community.

5. Warning situations are by their very nature time-sensitive and are not appropriate subjects for long, drawn out substantive negotiations among members of the community. Among organizations, persuasiveness is often equated with bureaucratic power rather than substantive attractiveness. It is for this reason that whatever entity takes on the responsibility of providing alternative hypotheses it must be clearly separate from the other organizations and be able to publish the case for an alternative hypothesis for the consumption of non-intelligence security policy consumers. Over the past year and a half, conclusions of Strategic Warning Staff analysis have almost always failed to persuade the community, in a timely fashion, to address the issue of an alternative hypothesis except when the Staff published on its own. The cases of the invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war, both of which were correctly analyzed by the Staff, but for which the analysis was not published outside the

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intelligence community, were cases where the security policy consumer was not provided with alternative hypotheses in a timely manner. On the other hand, the Staff's alternative hypotheses with respect to changes in Soviet policy toward Iran and the Soviet's sense of urgency over the events in Poland, received close attention by the intelligence community and early attention by policymakers because of the Staff's published conclusions which were distributed to the national security policymakers.

6. The NIO/W is responsible for many other warning related activities of the intelligence community that require him to be closely associated with research and training efforts, production efforts, and coordination of warning related matters within the whole community. It would seem a difficult challenge indeed for the NIO/W to accomplish these cooperative functions while personally engaging in the production of alternative hypotheses to those offered by the organizations with which he must be associated. It has been useful, we believe, for the Warning Staff to initiate these alternative analyses that, although done with the approval of the NIO/W, are not personally associated with him. The proposals of the Warning Working Group, if implemented, would probably make it difficult for the NIO/W to publicize alternative hypotheses, as his own, without putting in jeopardy his close working relationship with the intelligence agencies.

7. The Strategic Warning Staff has been functioning well since its manning level has again approached that authorized and would no doubt operate better if the State Department filled its slot. The experience of the past year has shown how important it is to have analysts assigned to the Staff who are familiar with the political analysis community, the photo interpretation community, the SIGINT community, and the military analysis community. Some better balance and considerably more flexibility would accrue to the Staff, should the State Department fill its slot. It has seemed important that analysts on the Staff come from at least the three main intelligence organizations; because of particular expertise, because of different bases from which they approach the problem, and because of the ability to communicate back with analysts of their parent agency. Although the Staff has not always been provided with quality analysts, there has been a noticeable change for the better since the current DCID 1/5 was promulgated in May 1979. Only experienced analysts are of use to the Staff because warning is a predictive action, almost like the detection of change yet to come. Inexperienced analysts would have an inadequate basis for detecting or predicting such change. The present staff includes [] substantive and [] administrative personnel. With the world in its current volatile condition, the Staff would be hard pressed to sustain operations with fewer persons.

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8. The location of the Strategic Warning Staff, or its follow-on, is important only to the extent that it allows access to the flow of intelligence information and the NIO/W. The Staff's effectiveness would probably be improved by some sort of more direct access to the DCI. Location might have

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25X1 some bearing on said access. As implied earlier in this paper, it is important, however, that the location of the Strategic Warning Staff not be taken by the intelligence community at large as an indication that the Staff, by whatever name, is owned by some one of the agencies. We have noticed for example that some of our conclusions were thought of as DIA conclusions simply because our mailing address is DIA/SWS; presumably the same problem would occur if the Staff were moved to Langley. With respect to avoiding the illusion that the Staff belongs to some agency, it might better be placed at the [redacted] or some such community establishment.

9. The warning function, as expressed in the DCID 1/5 and in the study by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, might be better performed with somewhat more publication by the Staff, by a closer relationship with the NIO/W, and by a closer relationship of the NIO/W with the DCI concerning the analysis done by the Staff. On the other hand, the Staff's experience with the community when its conclusions were not published suggests that, should the Staff no longer be involved in publishing as a separate entity, it is likely to become simply another current intelligence organization, but one that is unheard. An enlarged staff for the NIO/W, intended to cover the world, would be like a smaller version of the old National Indications Center with less capability to provide either the basis to act as a conscience of the community or good current intelligence. The solution as recommended in the referenced NFAC memo seems costly in analyst assets but not very valuable as an intelligence tool. It might even be counterproductive if seen as a threat to the reporting responsibility of other current intelligence organizations, preventing the NIO/W from establishing and maintaining the close relationship intended by the DCID 1/5. Our recommendation is to maintain an autonomous entity like the SWS, or if that is unacceptable, abolish the SWS, create no follow-on entity, and return the scarce analyst assets to the parent intelligence organizations.

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Director, Strategic Warning Staff

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